

# The Book of Love

BY ALICE BROWN

IN September the marshes at Sedgemoor were all a golden shimmer, flushed here and there with patches of blood-red samphire. The summer colors were nothing to these: the brilliant sky, the blue water of the river, and the brown and yellow of ripened grass. The river flowed down between Red Island and the shore; and twice a day the tide swept back and forth, leaving wide lagoons to reflect the sky, and then flooding them again with its own wavering blue. The road to the island led over a little bridge between skirting amplitudes of marsh, and the island itself was made of red sand, beaten upon by the waves of the outer sea. But opposite the island, with only the river between them, stood the old gray shingled house in a waste of barren land. Within, on this cold night, an unseasonable night for the early fall, it was all warmth and comfort of a simple sort. There were sweeping red curtains beside the windows, and the fire leaped hotly, seeming to burn up something in the air, and to return the hungrier for what it fed on. A long table in the middle of the room was laden with orderly piles of papers, and at one side of it sat John Graham, at work on his anthology. He was a gaunt, muscular man approaching middle age by a tranquil road. His fine profile was that of some old miniature modernized by the close mustache. His gray eyes were deeply set, and his dark hair showed a little white at the temples. The woman on the other side of the table sat very still, her head poised on her hand, her eyes fixed on some slips of paper before her. Yet from time to time she glanced briefly up at him, with the effect of effacing herself for some worthy motive. She was pale, though healthily so, with riches of brown hair. There were subtle meanings about her eyes and the corners of her delicate mouth. She gave the impression of being very well, of being related to wholesome things, kin to

fire and water, bread and apples, and all the elements most immediate to life. She was Elinor, his sister's friend; and his sister lay on the sofa in the dusk by the tall clock, regarding the two with comprehending eyes. Sally, the sister, was older than the others, and looked it. She was colorless, her hair turning relentlessly gray; but her eyes reflected all the light of her mind. They were quizzical in their alert intelligence.

"There, John," said she, presently, "you've worked long enough. Talk!"

The other two looked up, the man with a smile, Elinor smiling also, but with the air of saying "Hush!" She wore a veiled suggestion of standing by the man, shielding him, his leisure, his comfort, even from his sister. The sister knew that, and reflected upon it, with an extreme tenderness for them both. John shuffled his papers, and then pushed back the lock of hair unweariedly tumbling over his forehead. He looked across the table at Elinor, and her face lighted brilliantly in answer. Well-poised creature as she was, she had the air of being willing to wait indefinitely for notice, as if her pride turned to humility with him.

"Talk!" said Sally, impatiently. "You do get so dull, you two, over that work. I wish it were done."

"Don't say that," said Elinor, impulsively. "When it's done and you're well, Sally, I must go back to town. I wrote uncle this morning."

"Has he sent for you?" asked the man, quickly.

She smiled at him in swift response.

"No, not exactly. He only mentioned that I came to make Sally a visit in May, and that it's now September. He said he might go abroad in October, and that I'd better make up my mind to go with him."

"Oh no!" said Graham, hurriedly, and Sally smiled to herself.

"But you've written him why you stayed," she said.

"Oh yes! I wrote him. I told him you had a carriage accident, and Mr. Graham has an anthology, and that when you both get over them, I'll go back. I've represented myself as most important. I said I was needed."

"You are needed," said Graham.

"Well, it 'll be over soon enough," mused Sally, her eyes now on her brother's face. "I've almost got my strength again. We shall close the house, the winds will beat upon it, the tide will fret the sand; we shall go back to New York, and you'll be off to Europe. Ah, well!" She rose and left the room, limping slightly, and they settled down anew in their places.

"Shall I number those?" asked Elinor, stretching out a hand toward the pile of slips before him. He shook his head and made futile marks with a pencil.

"Are you really going to Europe?" he asked in a low tone.

Elinor, at the moment when his sister left the room, had seemed to gain a new sedateness, as if it were a veil between her and the man.

"It's a chance," said she, "a possibility."

"You see," he continued, "this has gone on so long—well, you are one of us, you know."

"It has been very pleasant," she returned, conventionally. But the pupils of the brown eyes widened to black.

"You are such a reasonable woman!" he broke forth, as if he made a confession.

She drew a quick breath, and leaned forward slightly across the table. Now she also took a pencil and began making little marks.

"What do you mean by a reasonable woman?" she asked in a tone of tranquil interest.

He had no difficulty in telling her. Things were quite apparent to him when they were apparent at all. He looked across at her brightly, with that smile which made him seem accessible, abounding in promises he could and would fulfil.

"Why," said he, "you are like a man. Don't mistake me. Your limits include the perfect feminine. You are a charming woman. But you are the only woman who seems to me entirely reasonable in her habit of life. Sally, now! I adore Sally, but she's full of subtleties

and withholdings. I couldn't get along without Sally, but, bless me! we don't speak the same language. And—I was engaged to a woman once. I was mighty uncomfortable."

"When it was broken?"

"No; while it was in progress. We didn't accord. I was a commonplace chap, just as I am now. She was all emotion. That's what I mean when I contrast her with you and call you reasonable. You could lead a man's life, all work and no play. You've got work of your own."

"Yes," said Elinor, rather listlessly, "I have work of my own."

"What I mean is, you wouldn't let the course of life be broken by tempests, jealousies, emotions. You wouldn't row if a man forgot to send you roses, or nag him into writing every day."

"Oh dear no!" said Elinor, brightly. "If I'd got to have the roses, I should expect them from some man who did remember."

This was not quite the logical sequence as Graham saw it.

"Yes, of course," he agreed. "Only, I mean if a man said he cared about you, that would be the end of it. You wouldn't expect vain repetition. Why, don't you know how reasonable you are?"

Elinor looked at him for an instant as if her mind made a perceptible pause before a leap into some new position. Then she took her leap, and did it gallantly.

"Yes, let us assume that I am reasonable."

A log in the fireplace fell gently, with the effect of easing itself. Graham leaned back in his chair and began talking, as if he let his mind loose luxuriously.

"I haven't spoken of that girl for years—the girl I was engaged to. I suppose I was in love with her. It passed for that. But even now I think of her with such irritation— Well, I can't describe it to you. Elinor—"

Her face ignored this new usage of her name; none the less, she was throbbingly conscious of it.

"Elinor, she invaded me. She insisted on my keeping up all kinds of petty worship and observances— I can't describe it to you. I couldn't do it. I've got to be I, if I do take a wife?" He was even husky and querulous in his perplexity.

"Yes," said Elinor, soothingly, "yes, of course you've got to be you."

"We quarrelled." There was a reminiscent glee upon his face. "I don't remember what it was about. Actually I don't. But I was so relieved. She dismissed me. I felt like a boy let out of school." He looked at her in whimsical apology. "I ought to have been ashamed. I wasn't. I couldn't be. I'm not now. I wanted my walking-papers, that was all. And I'd got 'em!" He rubbed his hands in a joy so irrepressible that again she smiled.

"What about her?" she asked—"the woman? Was she glad?"

"She thought not, for a while," he said, with the frankness of one to whom simplicity of statement makes the thing itself quite simple. "She was rather pale, and they took her away to the sea. But in a year she married, and now Sally says she wears jet prematurely. But I don't know what that indicates."

Elinor looked him in the face with the air of accepting a part.

"So be it," said she. "I am reasonable. What then?"

"Why, then," he resumed, a trace of heat in his manner—"then I want to ask you—"

She was not ready. Her apparent mood changed as a flaw runs over the waves.

"Don't ask me anything," she said, dominating him briefly—"anything to take thought. I have a plan of my own."

He was ingenuously disconcerted. Through these weeks of changing summer weather she had betrayed neither moods nor desires. She had simply, as a visitor, shown a genius for fitting in. There was no hint of an irritating abnegation in that attitude; she merely seemed to be interested in life as others wanted it, to an extent that brightened it into vividness and pleasure.

"I am going," said she, "to write a story. To be called 'The Book of Love.'"

"When did you think of it? Just now at this moment?"

A shade of withdrawal passed over her face. It suggested that she might have little confidences with herself alone.

"Oh, I've thought of it off and on! It is the story of a man and his wife. She has to express herself. He is inarticu-

late. She thinks married life is the expansion of courtship. She disconcerts him. He meant to provide her with house and lands and suitable amusements, to cleave to her and his business. She is looking forward to romance every day. He is terrified!"

Graham was regarding her with open suspicion.

"You haven't got that out of the story I just told you?" he asked. "About the girl—and me?"

"Oh no!" said she, demurely. "That may have reminded me, but it's a situation I've come upon before. Your case is not an isolated one. The wife isn't a sentimentalist, mind you. She's a solid, sane woman, with moving blood and a tendency to worship. And she worships this man."

Graham shook his head.

"Oh!" said he. "I begin to be sorry for him. Women mustn't worship. Men mustn't either. They must form an equable partnership, and carry on their mutual work. Otherwise—well, I've been shipwrecked, and I know."

He was staring moodily into the fire, and she could caress him with that maternal look, half indulgence, half tenderness, which certain women give to men who seem to them like children, only a little dearer.

"True," said she, soberly, "and our woman speedily found that out. And because she loved the man, she resolved to become something different. But she couldn't. None of us can. We can only turn our vices into tools to work with."

"But she couldn't make herself over," he said, hopelessly. "You own that."

"Oh yes, she could—outside! And he came home to dinner every night, and found an admirable soup, and just the kind of wife he wanted to serve it."

"I don't like that man. He seems selfish."

"No, no! He was a dear good fellow. He was working for her all day long. Only he didn't know she had her little hungers that could have been satisfied as easily as playing a game of fox and geese. The fox and geese might have bored him, but it wouldn't have taken very long."

"But the Book of Love?"

"Oh, I forgot! Well, you see there

was a big tract in life, according to her fancy, and they'd only begun to explore it when courting-time was over. And now she didn't dare to go there after dark, there were such beguiling things: only they were not real. The apples looked like apples, but they turned into dust on the lips—not ashes, but a light, fragrant dust that is less than nothing. There were beautiful dances, but the dancers were hollow like hill-wives. There were faithful fires always burning, but no one could warm his hands at them. There were little whispers that told nothing, for certain whispers must be heard by two; and there were flowers everywhere. But the flowers had no smell."

"But why? why?" said the man. He spoke like a child, and indeed he felt like one. For her voice, with its smooth singing quality, had gone on as if she told a fairy-story, and the room, the glancing fire, and even he and she seemed a little unreal. They might have been the man and woman in the Book of Love.

"Because," said Elinor, "the woman was made to live in a House of Love, where two creatures together build up something imperishable. I mean something out of the spirit of life, which is more real than life itself. But the man didn't know there was such a house, and the woman had to live in it alone. And that is unfortunate. The house gathers mould and ghosts."

"Didn't he love her?"

"Very much. But I can't explain any more. Enter the Book of Love. The woman got very lonesome. That untamed soul inside her beat against its bars, and suffered horribly. From a kind of hunger, you know! She could not help telling him she loved him, and to him repetitions were superfluous. She was a part of him, bone of his bone. His own bones did not need antiphonal pæans. And so—it's very simple—the woman got a book, and set down in it all the things she wanted to say to the man and couldn't. It was the journal of their pilgrimage together—only seen from the inside and not the outside, as he saw it."

"And he found the journal?"

"Yes, I think he found it. But only after she had died."

"So he realized he never had known her at all?"

"Oh, he'd known all he wanted! She never deceived him. She was candor itself, so far as she went. Only when he came home at night, instead of saying, 'I'm glad—glad—glad to see you!' she said: 'Oh, I've had such fun to-day! Want to hear about it?'"

"But *had* she had fun?"

"Not particularly. Only it pleased him to think so."

"I don't know whether I like that woman," said Graham, gloomily.

"Oh, well, if you don't, then you don't like any woman! Only not all of them write a book."

Here Sally came back, and after an interlude of idle talking, Elinor left the room. The brother and sister sat silent a moment, and then Graham remarked,

"Sally, I've been telling Elinor she is a perfectly reasonable woman."

"Oh," said Sally, with cordial interest. "How pleased she must have been!"

"And yet she seems to understand the other kind of woman too. But she is reasonable, isn't she? Like a man!"

"Oh, you dear fool!" murmured Sally to the ceiling.

"What did you say, dear?" asked her brother, solicitously.

"Nothing, dear! Only we might have a snack of bread and cheese before we go to bed."

The next day began the writing of the Book of Love. Elinor sat at her side of the table while Graham dived at his, and bent over her paper in deep absorption. He found himself watching her, from time to time, and then refraining lest she be disquieted. But she had no eyes for him. The delicate antennæ of her mind were stretching forth toward something quite outside his field of vision; and that mental isolation half bewildered him. But she only worked when Sally was taking her daily nap, or writing letters in the room above. Sally's naps were longer now than they had been, her letter-writing more copious. Once Elinor flew up stairs in a tempest of remorse, and swooped down upon her where she sat happily by the window, her idle hands upon her lap.

"Oh, Sally," said she, contritely, "you mustn't stay away because I'm writing!"

Sally did not combat the reason. They had long ago dropped civil platitudes.

"I like to, dear," she said. "You can write better down there."

Neither of them counted the man when they thought of solitude. They both knew the double ease of being with him, his fine, still presence.

So the Book of Love went on from day to day, and Graham kept the silence of one who reverences a growing work. Elinor grew paler, and her hair, pushed back by that impatient hand, left her forehead careworn. That touched some unrecognized spring of tenderness in him, and one night, while they were working by the fire, he spoke. But it was not until he had stretched a hand across the table and laid it on the page she was regarding that he saw fine, anxious lines upon her face.

"You are tiring yourself," he said.

She looked up quickly, and seemed to throw aside some veiling thought. Here was her old frank self.

"I am tired," she said, "but not of this. I could write and write. It need never be finished. It leads everywhere."

"I wish I could hear some of it," he said, wistfully. He had a great reverence for work spun out of the brain. It made him shy.

"Oh, you shall!" said Elinor at once. "It may not mean anything to you. It's a little letter to women. And the women themselves might be angry because it betrays too much; only they'll know men—real men—don't speak that language. I'll read you a bit here and there."

Whereupon she began reading, quite gravely and impersonally, as if the story belonged to some one else: "... At first I meant to write this book so that you might some time see it and know what was in my heart. But that would hamper me. I should grow self-conscious. So you shall never read the book, but I shall write it, like a letter, exactly as if you were to read it. I shall say You. It is so strange to live with you! I never get used to it. This dual consciousness, this incessant, unspoken interchange! When I first knew you, the fact of you walked like a ghost and broke my rest. My eyes would fly open at three o'clock in the dark spring dawns, and my spirit would stare back almost affrighted at what called her. Then I would lie late into the morning,

tasting the certainty that you were alive, and that it meant something quite unlike what it could mean to any one else, save perhaps your mother. I have mused over her holy vigils before you were born. She thought of her son. I think of my lover. To both of us he is a man-child. And the thought of you still starts awake beside me, like the preluding note of your presence. We are in the same house. I hear your voice, I see the look on your face; yet beyond and beyond all that is the subtle atmosphere of you now like the breath of your soul, like an aura. The unseen phantom of you walks beside me all day long."

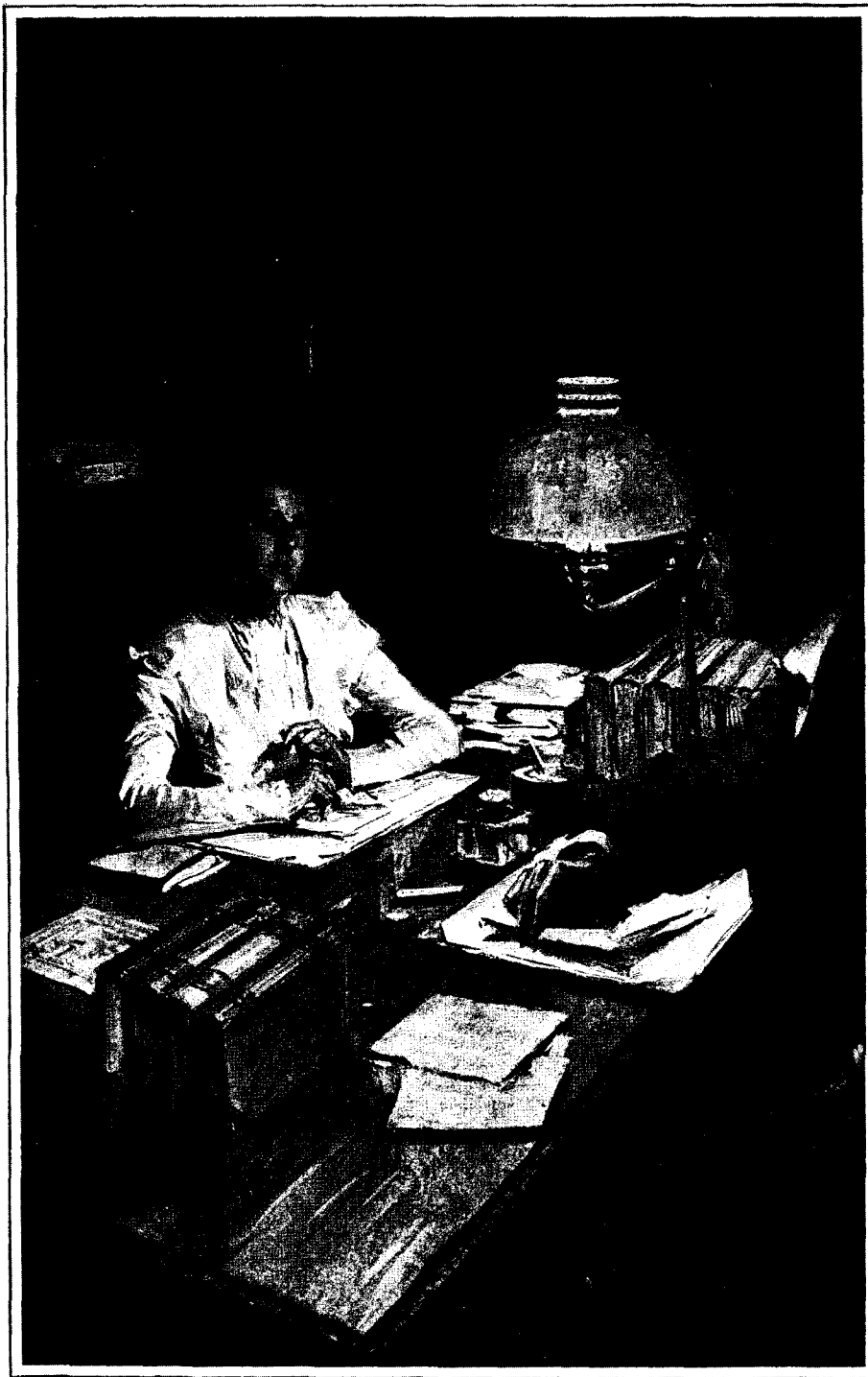
"That is very strange," said Graham. "You probe too far. These are mysteries."

But Elinor sifted the pages and went on reading: "'We live together, yet really we each live alone. It terrifies me. This is true, at least: that I must live alone because you don't often care to come into my garden; and I watch you so hard to see what you want, that I think I shall always hear and come into yours when you call me. There is such an overplus in mine—weeds, flowers, sweet-smelling, strong-smelling! I don't wonder you lose your way. But yours is a green field, with coverts for shade and springs where we need them. So I shall visit you there, though really I must live alone. When I first found that out, it seemed like not living at all. Then I said it is a part of my acquiescence, a part of your rights, the rights I accord you of my own glad will. Since that I have had my secrets from you. I think the reason chiefly is that I want to leave you free.'"

"What does she mean by that?"

"She tells on the next page: 'Do you remember, in courting-time, how I moved from the back of the house to the front, so that I could see you when you went by to work, to your sister's, back and forth a dozen times a day? I told you, and then I saw that I had conjured up a duty for you. You went past when it was not the nearest way. You were pathetically anxious to explain the times when it was impossible to go. So I moved back again. After that I had my little secrets. I wanted you to be free.'"

"But what kind of secrets?"



HE LOOKED ACROSS AT HER BRIGHTLY

"Oh, ultra-foolish things, done only by dotards or women in love! Stroking his coat when she found it hanging in the hall, adoring his glove because it kept the shape of his hand, writing him letters and tearing them up. Heavens! don't ask me! But here she begins to see ghosts:

"I am lonesome. I am almost afraid. When we first knew each other, I thought that spark, struck out in the darkness, would light the world. It did not go out. You love me. *But it does not light the world.* In the first days you were like a strong spirit, radiant, on fire. Shall you never be that again? The flower cannot open twice, but I thought the plant would bloom and bloom."

"I call this a kind of divine nonsense!" said Graham, his mind at bay.

"So it is. I can't abide her myself. She's a whimperer. I hoped to make her flesh and blood."

"Never mind. Go on!"

"... We women are children, dear. So are you, only you are a different kind. We have to be assured, reassured, warmed, soothed, and tended. We cannot take things for granted. You must tell us even the deep things more than once. There are such timorous fibres in us, such hurrying pulses. If you were walking in the dark with me, and I said, 'I am afraid!' you would speak to me. You would take my hand and treat me tenderly. Dear, do not let me be afraid."

"... Your fighting is done out in the world. Our warfare is chiefly of the heart. Do not forget that. We are very strong in patience and endurance—yet very weak."

"... I am setting in order my remembrances of the first days of love. They are packed away to be taken out when we are old, to muse on by the fire. The young will think: 'She has had her day. It is all over for her, and we are beginning.' But they will be wrong. It will not be over. While we sit there, I at my knitting, you at your book, my wise little soul will have gone away into her own house where no one enters. She will have spread her table and eaten her sacramental bread alone. She will remember."

"... Sometimes I think if I were more beautiful, more compelling, I could draw you away from the appearance of things to what seem to me the things

themselves. I do not mean more beautiful in body. I mean some lustre of the mind so fine you must perceive it."

"... You said the other day I wanted life to be lived on tiptoe. Perhaps I do. I want it to be vivid, fragrant. We are here for so short a time. Even youth is so short."

"Tell me," said Graham, stopping her by a finger on her sleeve, "are women always unhappy?"

She sat still, acutely conscious of him and the hand he had forgotten. Suddenly she looked older, like a woman thrilled by emotions that burn to the centre, waste the heart and brain, and yet, being most vital, renew them gloriously.

"Unhappy?" she repeated. "Many of them are not—reasonable." A little smile quivered upon her lips, and now she looked at him. He forgot their talk, thinking only of her face.

"You are tired," he said. "Let the story go. Let anything go. Only don't look like that."

"It's the story," said she. "I've been thinking so hard. I am trying now to see how this woman can surmount the hostility between the male and female. She can surmount it, you see, because she is imaginary. We can make her as potent as we please."

"... I thought there was harmony between us, and that only. There is warfare, everlasting strife. We are like two adoring, fighting souls bound in one flesh. We are drawn irresistibly, and yet every fibre of our inheritance pushes us apart. In the beginning, you pursued. When I stopped long enough to see who it was that followed, I recognized you and I stayed. As soon as you found me irrevocably yours, you lost some vividness of pleasure. You had me; you missed the chase. At that point some women play a game. They pretend the chase may still continue. With you I can pretend to nothing. When life grows keen like this, sharp in the nostrils, big as the heavens, there ceases to be a game. Would you have the priest neglect the fire on the altar so that the worshipper may be surprised to see it newly lighted? Nay, the fire shall be always there, so long as these hands can tend it. There shall be no trickery."

"... But it is true: I am not sig-

nificant to you, now I am with you every day. If my highest note responds inevitably to yours, you do not call me. Surely you do not understand. You think I am attained. Dear, I am not attained. The soul is a growing creature. She is august. Cherish her, and she will repay you a thousandfold. Repulse her, drive her into fastnesses, and though you see her semblance, you see her no more. She will give all she can. You may not even guess you lose her—but she may be lost.’

“... One of us two must yield. The tie between us can only be welded by one great compromise. It shall be mine. The woman is more plastic. Let her bend her nature to his need. It shall be mine, dear. I do it gladly.’

“Then after a long time she writes:

“... I begin to understand your silences. I understand all silence. Our spirits talk together in spite of us. I laughed aloud the other day, for I learned the secret of old married life. We see some ancient man and woman sitting by the fire, exchanging now and then a word or smile. They look benignantly at youth, and youth sees envy in the glance. That silence between them is ineffable. They have outgrown the need of speech; and by-and-by, when one leaf flutters down, the other opens its withered, trembling grasp and flutters after. They know what they know.’

“I hate that woman!” she cried. “Don’t you see how she has got away from me? I intended to make the book a record of a hidden love, and it turns into a disquisition on the eternal difference between men and women. The husband shall see the book. It won’t hurt him, for he’ll find her out. She’s a self-conscious prig, and he’ll be glad he’s rid of her. I’ll kill her off. She shall go down to the island to moon on a stormy night, and walk off the little bridge.” But there were tears in her eyes. She loved the woman, it was plain, only she was a little ashamed of the predicament wherein she found herself with all womankind. Graham was regarding her somewhat wistfully.

“I wonder,” he said, “if I’ve been wrong—if what I’ve thought was lack of reason in women is really something big and fundamental, something worthy to be fed? Have I been wrong?”

If he had asked Sally that question, she would have said, satirically: “Wrong? Dear me, no! That isn’t possible.”

But Elinor had nothing but gentleness for him, a tenderness matching her comprehension of him, the simplicity that, in the midst of his manhood, kept him still a child.

“We don’t understand each other any too well,” she said, “men and women. As for us—the women—those deep, appalling fountains of affection in us are all used. They are the springs that feed our life. Out of them motherhood is made, great patience, infinite service. Oh no, it isn’t wasted!”

“I wish,” said Graham, haltingly, “you would teach me these things.”

She trembled a little, and as he looked at her it seemed to him that she was suddenly cold and unresponsive.

He went on: “I can’t imagine your going away. I want you to stay. I want you to marry me.”

Her lips were tight. They made a thin pink line, and changed her face incredibly. “I am afraid—” she said, gently. “It is only fair to tell you—”

“No, no!” he besought her in haste. “There isn’t anybody else?”

“I don’t mean that.”

“Then think of it, consider it. Please! It seems like a great presumption, because I don’t know anything about the things you know. Love—even the sound of it troubles me! But I would be good to you. I would not let you be sorry.”

“I know! I know! Still, you don’t quite—read me. You say I am a reasonable woman—”

“It is your wonderful charm.”

“But there are some things no woman can take in a reasonable way. This is one. It is a very big thing. We women think it is the biggest thing in the world. And it presupposes—great love.”

The man got up and paced the floor back and forth. His face was white, his lips were trembling. When he spoke, his voice shook.

“Dear,” he said, “I don’t understand those things. I honestly don’t. It’s a big word—love. I’m afraid of it. I’m not afraid of you. You seem as immediate to me as my own hand. But that word and all it seems to imply—I don’t know anything about it. I can’t deceive you. I



can't swear it. I can't." He was greatly moved. He seemed to himself to be failing in some terrible challenge. Yet he must not fail.

"No," she said, gently. "Of course you can't. You sha'n't swear anything."

"It seems insulting to you," he went on, tremulously. "You are bigger, more wonderful than anything I ever imagined. I am afraid of you; yet you are so dear that I am not afraid of you at all. There's nobody like you, nobody. I should try so hard—all my life—to make you happy."

He looked like a boy, like the little old photograph his sister had upstairs. Once when Elinor was alone in the room with the picture she had put it against her cheek. Some flooding impulse made her remember that now. She rose hastily.

"We mustn't talk," she said. "We're friends, you know, the best of friends. Good-night."

"You can't do it?" he asked. "You can't consider it?"

"Don't say I can't do it. We can't do it. I couldn't let you marry my kind of woman, no matter how innocuous she might seem. For if she didn't turn out so reasonable after all—why, there'd have to be some little spark of madness in you to help you understand it. That sort of madness is a wonderful illuminator of dark corners."

She said good-night again in her old frank way, and he watched her up the stairs. He stayed very late that night over the fire, pondering about love as it seemed to other men. But he could not compass it. They evidently meant something which looked to him very simple, and yet they had agreed to tangle it in a net of words.

The next morning Elinor came late to breakfast, and found at her plate a letter calling her back to town. She handed it to Sally without a look of comment. They two were alone, for Graham, with some irresistible disquietude upon him, was walking to the island, to get his blood in tune for the day's work. Sally read the letter, and passed it back.

"Well," she said, "I suppose it had to come some time. But I hoped—"

She stopped there, and Elinor made haste to speak. "I might as well take the morning train," said she.

So when Graham came back from the island he found luncheon ready, a shining house, such as houses are made for men who are much prized, but only Sally at the table.

"Elinor has gone," said she, when she found him pausing over the fish.

"Gone? Where?"

"Her uncle sent for her. He's very much hyped."

"Well, what of it? What does he want of *her*?"

"Oh, I don't know! What do we want of her? Elinor's an incurable habit, once you get used to her."

Graham stared at his plate, and then fell to and ate large quantities of luncheon. But he did not settle himself to work that afternoon. Sally saw him walking up and down the water-front where the sedge is glorious, his hands behind his back. She smiled, and then sighed. It often seemed to her that people lost incalculably, in life, through lack of brain.

But that evening he took quite patiently to his papers, and Sally, lying on her sofa, read a novel intermittently and watched him.

"What are you reading?" he asked her suddenly, in a pause of shuffling manuscript. She showed him the paper-covered book. "How can you waste your time over trash like that?" he ended, fractionally. Sally had hardly seen him cross since he was a boy, and her heart ached for him.

"It's life," she said, gently. "These are real people."

"I suppose they fall in love?"

"Oh yes!"

"Break their hearts over it?"

"Approximately."

"Pshaw!" He took up his pen and began to write. Presently he threw it down again, and went to kick a log into place. "I wish chimneys could be made to draw," he said, savagely. "I hate a sulking fire." But while he spoke, the flames were bellowing up the chimney, and Sally smiled. Yet the next instant she caught a little sigh, and whispered to herself, "Poor boy!"

He came back to his place, and she sank into her reading.

"Sally," said he, "what if we should go back to town?"



BUT HE COULD NOT COMPASS IT

She blew him a noiseless kiss, but her tone told nothing.

"I thought you wanted to spend the winter here."

"I did, but—somehow it's all different. I suppose it's the frost in the air. I can't work here. I want to get into my own study. Look at this lamp, even!" It was a shining splendor of good care. "A man can't work under such conditions."

Sally laid down her book and folded her hands upon it.

"I fancied," she said, rather indifferently, "I might like to wait to hear from Elinor. If she is going abroad, I'll hurry back to town. If they're not going, it might be she'd come here and stay awhile. I asked her."

"You did? Oh, well, very well, then!" He settled himself cozily to work. "There! the fire's burning now."

It was three days before a letter came from Elinor, and then she knew no more about her prospects than before. The

letter itself was vaguely unsatisfying, and after Sally had read it aloud, Graham sat still, his legs stretched out to the fire.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Yes, that's all."

He got up and walked to the door. There he paused a moment, his great shoulders bent a little under some unseen weight. Sally was pitifully moved for him, he looked so hurt and sorry.

"When you write," said he, "ask her if she has finished the Book of Love."

"What's that?—the story where the woman breaks her heart because her husband won't make love to her?"

Graham regarded her for a moment with eyes grown dark in wonder. He came back and sat down, viewing her with an unwinking curiosity. "Is that how it struck you?" he inquired.

"Why, yes!" said Sally, carelessly. "I thought that was the gist of it."

Graham got up and strode out of doors. He did not stop until he was face to face with the waves rolling in on Red Island. Even they seemed to him less tumultuous than the affairs of men.

Elinor referred to his question about the Book of Love, but rather impersonally, so that he could hardly decide whether the answer were intended for him alone.

"No, I have not finished the story," she wrote. "You see, I've got to kill off the woman, and I don't know how to do it. I want her to fall off the little Red Island bridge, but I never fell off a bridge myself, and I can't tell how it seems. Some stormy night, maybe, I shall take the train to Sedgemoor, and walk down to the bridge and do the act. It's very shallow there, you know. Then I'll come splashing to your door to be dried off."

"Do you think she meant that?" asked Graham, suddenly, a half-hour after Sally had read him the letter.

"What?"

"About going down to the bridge in a storm, and tumbling off."

"Oh, I dare say!" said Sally, carelessly. "She's equal to it."

It happened soon after this that the hunter's moon came and bewitched the nights. They were like a more enchanting day, and so clear and warm that Sally covered herself close and lay in a steam-

er chair on the piazza for hours, enraptured with the time. Then a miracle happened. Suddenly the sea began roaring so loud and so continuously that the sound came sweeping from Red Island over the river's mouth to the mainland, and clamored at the door. There was a weirdness about its great disquiet, because there seemed to be no accompanying cause. The moon was clear in a cloudless heaven; there was no breeze. Yet the water roared without cessation, booming and breaking on the shore. The first night nobody in the house could sleep. Next day one of the fishermen talked stolidly about a storm at sea, and that night the clamor was unabated. On the third night Graham looked hollow-eyed and haggard.

"Has it kept you awake?" Sally asked him in a hushed voice, when they rose from their dinner table. He nodded without speaking, and the lines in his face contracted as if all the accustomed incidents of life might hurt him now. He got his coat, and Sally knew where he was going. She had driven down to Red Island that day, to see the waves, and she hated the powerlessness of her state; she longed to go again to be deafened by that turmoil in the dark. There was a hush in the air of the house, like the strangeness of the night. Something was going to happen, and it stirred her blood to know he scented it as well as she.

Graham struck out sharply along the sandy road. The moon was regnant in a crystal sky. In that flooding splendor he felt alone as he had never felt before. The rote of the sea called to him and made him the more desolate. He was bereft, undone, in a universe once filled with life, but now darkly hostile to him. He knew at last what seemed to him the wrong of being: to have been made to run inexorably in one narrow groove, and yet with eyes to see on either side the greater joys of others, even their greater tragedies. So he went on to the little bridge where the tide comes laving in, and where it lay that night in pools, responsive in strange glitterings to the moon. The thought of Elinor had ached at his heart all day. Now it grew so keen that there were tears upon his cheeks. And strangely enough, they did not seem to be tears, but the wash of the wide sea,



FROM THE OTHER END OF THE LITTLE BRIDGE SHE CAME TO MEET HIM

calling and calling beyond Red Island and making all things one. He understood the grief of creatures who know their mates too late, only to lose them. He shrank from the alien desolation of the universe when one strange yet poignantly familiar soul was not beside him in it.

From the other end of the little bridge she came to meet him, in her big hat, her thick dark cloak. She walked up to him, and he saw her face, pale, yet somehow luminous in that silver shower. Instantly he thought of paradise as saints have pictured it, dim shores where our beloved come to meet us and every breath is balm. But all he could say was this:

"What made you come?"

"The storm. The sea. Sally's letter told me how it roared."

It was all like an ineffable dream without words. Graham put out his hands, and she as freely gave him hers. Then in that instant their cheeks had touched, their lips, and the great currents of unseen life had mingled.

"I can't talk about it," said the man.

"No," said the woman. "I don't want you to talk."

"But if you knew—" Some natural dumbness gripped him and he paused. "Hear it," he said, "the sea!" They listened, with one pulse. "But why are you down here, after all?" he asked.

"I came on the late train. I got to the house while you were at dinner, and I looked in at the window. I couldn't go

in. I was too glad. So I came down here and wished for you to come. I called you."

"I heard you, dear. I heard you, Elinor!"

A fierce breath tore the word in two, and the woman put up her hands and laid them gently about his neck. She was smiling and crying a little in that way women have, and she spoke with great tenderness.

"Oh, little son! don't try to make love. Do you want me to live with you? I will. You said I was a reasonable woman. I am. Come home to Sally now."

Sally did not say very much when the two walked in. She hardly dared. There was an ineffable air of life and light and power about them, and she had a deep respect for denizens of brighter worlds.

Elinor put away her cloak and hat, and went about as if she were no guest, but rather the spirit of the home. She asked for something to eat, and got it herself, because the maid was out; and she set a plate before Graham, and made him drink from her cup, while he looked at her with shining eyes. When they had eaten, they sat down by the fire together, and talked about staying all winter and finishing the anthology.

"How about the woman in the Book of Love?" asked Sally from the doorway, on her way to bed. "You killed her off, of course!"

Elinor's face flashed into a great beauty of heat and color.

"No," said she. "I let her live